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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8859
INFO RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9557
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT PRIORITY 1037
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK PRIORITY 3761
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 0867
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1596
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 6039
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6973
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9147
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 1721
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 2522
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 9918
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 7917
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 016944

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SUBJECT: DEATH OF NAWAB BUGTI, BALOCH TRIBAL INSURGENT
LEADER

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Derived from DSCG 05-01, d

11. (C) Summary: The killing of Baloch tribal insurgent leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti by security forces on Saturday has dismayed politicians across the political spectrum, including members of the party that President Musharraf relies on to run the country, and triggered riots in a limited number of cities in Balochistan. Government politicians are now playing down the initial military triumphalism at the death of Nawab Bugti. The people of Balochistan had an ambivalent relationship with Nawab Bugti: some saw him as a great nationalist leader fighting for the province's economic rights, others saw him as a self-serving tribal lord whose violent tactics against the economic infrastructure hurt the people of the province, not just the central government. End summary.

How He Died

12. (U) There are conflicting stories about how Nawab Bugti was tracked down. Some press reports say that the security forces located him through a satellite telephone call. However, the government has stated that an attack on an Army helicopter on August 23 led security forces to launch an operation the next day that eventually led to the assault on the cave in which Bugti was hiding on Saturday. As many as 27 government security forces and 60 militants were killed in the attack, according to press reports. The assault was described as a "commando" operation involving officers from the Pakistan Army's elite Special Services Group. The government asserts that its forces came under heavy fire from the cave and when they returned fire and attempted to enter it, the roof collapsed, killing all inside, including a number of soldiers and officers. Nawab Bugti's presence in the cave was confirmed by captured militants, according to the government. Tikka Khan, editor of the Urdu-daily Islam, told Embassy that if the Nawab was located by satellite phone it proves the government was specifically searching for him and makes his killing a deliberate criminal act.

13. (U) The start of the operation against Nawab Bugti on August 24 coincided with what was described as a "first-ever" Bugti tribal jirga, attended by thousands of government-allied tribesmen at which they, in essence, deposed Nawab Bugti by declaring the "end to the Nawabi system" and pledging their support to the government.

14. (U) Initially, there were reports that two of Nawab Bugti's grandsons, including his heir-apparent Brahamdag, were also in the cave, along with Mir Balaach Khan Marri, son of Marri tribal leader Nawab Khair Bux Marri. However, President Musharraf and the government spokesman would not confirm whether Nawab Bugti's grandsons or Balaach Marri died in the attack. Agha Shahid Bugti, the Nawab's son-in-law, also refused to confirm whether the grandsons survived or were killed in the operation, according to one press report. A separate press report stated that one of Nawab Bugti's grandsons was captured; a spokesman for the Marri tribe said that Balaach Marri and both Bugti grandsons were alive. As of Monday, bodies were still being dug out of the cave rubble.

15. (U) Nawab Bugti, who was reportedly 79, was both a former provincial governor and chief minister. In 1946, Nawab Bugti took over leadership of the Bugti tribe (Nawab is a title meaning prince), which is currently estimated as having 200,000 members and a militia of 5,000 fighters. Since early 2005, he had led his tribe's armed resistance to the government. In recent months, the government security forces, led by Frontier Corps troops backed by Army helicopters and artillery, had driven Bugti into hiding in the mountains.

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Crowing Soldiers, Sober Politicians

16. (C) In the aftermath of Nawab Bugti death, General Musharraf said that the government would take "every step" necessary to extend its writ into Balochistan. The tone of the initial news reports was of a military success. But the tenor changed as opposition politicians, including those from beyond Balochistan, began criticizing the killing. Journalists and nationalist politicians within Balochistan, including politicians opposed to the sardari system, told Embassy that the Nawab's death would be a rallying point for opponents of the government and could lead to increased violence against Punjabis in the province. (Note: The federal government and Army are seen as being dominated by Punjab Province. End note.)

17. (C) Even top leaders in the governing PML-Q were circumspect in their comments about Nawab Bugti's death. Senator Mushahid Hussain, PML-Q General Secretary, told Polcouns that Nawab Bugti's death was regrettable and avoidable. Mushahid and PML-Q President Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain have arranged for the Army to transport two of Nawab Bugti's sons to the cave site where he died, so that they can oversee the recovery of the body, which will be turned over to the family for burial in Dera Bugti.

18. (U) Newspaper editorials called for the end of military action and the start of negotiations to resolve the province's grievances, which stem from the belief that Islamabad has not given the province a fair share of the revenues generated by its mineral wealth or an adequate share of the jobs in ongoing development projects in the province. Mushahid Hussain said the death creates the opportunity to revisit the recommendations of a committee he led last year that called for increasing economic opportunities in Balochistan, investing in social infrastructure, limiting settler influence in elections, and increasing provincial autonomy and control over natural gas revenues.

19. (U) Nawab Bugti's death sparked protests and riots in Quetta, Balochistan's capital, and other cities, in which at

least three people were killed and 50 injured. In Quetta roughly 600 protesters were arrested. On Monday, Quetta experienced a citywide strike, with roads empty and most shops closed. In addition, the main highways from Quetta to Karachi and Punjab Province were also blocked by protesters.

¶10. (C) Comment: The unrest triggered by Nawab Bugti's death has been confined, so far, to just five of Balochistan's 27 districts, with disturbances, however, also occurring in Karachi in Sindh Province. Crowds in Quetta were violent but not exceedingly large by Pakistani standards. One Embassy interlocutor said the size of the crowds was limited because people have known for months that the security forces were closing in on Nawab Bugti. Notably, members of Musharraf's ruling party are now emphasizing that Nawab Bugti died because the roof of the cave collapsed, as opposed to being killed directly by government troops. PML-Q leaders may be downplaying the military success because the party faces a no confidence vote in the National Assembly later this week. If Brahamdagh Bugti, the Nawab's anointed successor, was killed, the GOP would have eliminated the most likely leader to take the reins of the insurgency from Nawab Bugti. End comment.
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